

Question on Notice

No. 708

Asked on 12 June 2025

MR J MARTIN ASKED MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND AMBULANCE SERVICES (HON T NICHOLLS)—

QUESTION

With reference to Australians under the age of 50 having the highest rate of bowel cancer in the world—

Will the Minister advise what the government is doing to help prevent bowel cancer in people under the age of 50?

ANSWER

I am advised that ongoing research is needed globally to establish the causes and trends associated with bowel cancer in younger people. Further to this, shifting attitudes that bowel cancer is only found in older persons, increased awareness of early bowel cancer symptoms, and a proactive approach in response to gut health disturbances are required. To address this Queensland Health has developed a Cancer Screening Education for General Practitioners course. The course is available online for no cost and attracts Continuing Professional Development points.

Due to the higher incidence rates in the 45 and above age groups, the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP) offers free screening to people aged between 45 and 74 years, when bowel cancer rates are highest, and the benefits of screening outweigh any potential harms. Queensland Health actively supports and encourages eligible Queenslanders to participate in the NBCSP. From 1 July 2024, those aged 45-49 years are now eligible to request a screening kit and if they complete the kit, will be subsequently invited to participate again in two years.

While it is too early to determine the participation rate for the newly eligible 45-49 year age group, between July to December 2024 over 15,000 kits were requested by Queenslanders in this cohort. Despite the NBCSP being a free national screening program, only 38.8 per cent of eligible Queenslanders participated in 2022-23. Notwithstanding, rates of colorectal cancer (CRC) have been declining in people aged over 50 because of the NBCSP.

In order to reduce the impacts of CRC, Queensland Health invests in a broad range of initiatives aimed at increasing recruitment and participation in bowel screening, which include, following up Queenslanders who return a positive screening result to ensure they see their GP, sending tailored messages via SMS to prompt completion of the screening kit, supporting GPs to issue kits, and partnering with researchers to trial new and innovative methods to increase participation. .